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THE CATBIRD.

Galeoscoptes Carolinensis.

BY WM. L. KELLS, LISTOWEL, CANADA.

The vocal imitative powers of the mocking birds, have long been a theme for the poet, and the admiration of the naturalist. Different species of these birds are found in various parts of North

America, but the species most commonly found in Ontario, and the other divisions of Canada is the Cat or Mewing Bird.



THE CATBIRD.

This species is about ten inches in length. The plumage is sooty black, the wings and tail being of a darker hue than the rest of the body. The bill, feet and eyes are also black, the

tail being remarkably long. It frequents shrubberies, vineyards, old orchards, beaver meadows, the willow-grown margins of the creeks, and wherever there is the thick shade of low underwood, and in such places the female builds her nest, usually near the ground, among the thickest bushes or evergreen shrubs, where it is well concealed from observation. This is composed of small brambles, stalks of dry weeds, dry leaves, plastered inside with mud and lined with rootlets and some fine, dry grass.

The set of eggs, generally four in number, sometimes five, are of a deep greenish hue and measure .95x.71 inches. Two broods are generally raised in the season, but the bird has many enemies

among the feathered race, as well as small animals, and is often robbed of its contemplated family. To its nest and eggs the Mewing Bird is strongly attached, and the affectionate regard manifested by both parents towards their young is not surpassed by any other member of the feathered family. They are very diligent and careful in supplying their offspring with food, and should they be exposed to danger, will, in trying to defend them, encounter hazards to their own personal safety, seeming almost strangers to fear, and exercise all their arts in order to drive off the intruder.

The vocal powers of the male of this species are varied and wonderful; the notes of the Blackbird, the Wood Thrush, the Robin, the Grosbeak and the Goldfinch, the call of the Sandpiper, as well as the warbling and solos of various other field and forest birds, and even the cries of some small animals are all successfully imitated, intermingled with other notes peculiarly its own. It not only sings and imitates with deceptive exactness, but often performs a kind of dance at the same time, hopping from branch to branch as if keeping time to the music of its own voice. It often deceives persons by imitating the mewing of a kitten in distress or pain, and as soon as it is approached it either darts off through the brushwood or begins to warble some other notes, apparently pleased at thus deceiving the human ear. It also seems to take pleasure in teasing other birds by imitating their love calls, or notes of distress; and as soon as they approach its perch, terrifies them by the scream of some hawk or other bird of prey. While hay-making is in progress it will often visit the meadows in the vicinity of its haunts, for the purpose of securing a supply of insect food for its young, and often startles or amuses the hay-maker by its cat-like calls and other peculiar notes. But no persons are more annoyed by the "mewings" of the Catbird than the village berry-pickers, who, when in search of wild raspberries often invade its haunts, and while thus engaged are frequently affrighted of what they suppose to be the near approach of a wild-cat.

This species, though tolerably abundant, is rather solitary in its personal habits, and seldom is more than one pair found in the same vicinity. It is quick in its movements; its flight is usually short, but rapid, and it feeds on various species of insects and

berries, and may also sometimes destroy the eggs of smaller birds. In the spring-time it makes its advent in the central part of Ontario usually about the beginning of the second week of May and departs again in the early part of September, the winter home being the region of the Gulf of Mexico and the West India Islands.

I well remember my first acquaintance with the Catbird, and the discovery of its nest. The creek which intersected the old homestead farm, on which were passed my boyhood days, on reaching the boundary line of our premises, made a short curve back into the woods, which for years after the front portion of our farm had been cleared, remained still in a state of primitive wildness. Here, in the bend, was a thick growth of underwood, and in the summer time shaded with a dense foliage. Often out of this glen-like spot came strange, wild sounds the causes of which we children of the farm were at first too much afraid to investigate. At length, one summer day I mustered up courage and went down into this wild place. On proceeding, a series of kitten-like "mews" greeted my ears, and I soon discovered the authors in a pair of dark-colored birds, near the size of a Robin, but with longer tails, who were darting about among the branches and evidently much alarmed at my invasion of their retreat. I also soon discovered the reason for their distress in the form of a large nest, placed in the forks of a very slender blue beach, which upon reaching I found to contain three young birds, a few days old, and one greenish-colored egg, the first of this species I had ever seen. I felt not a little proud of my adventure and discovery, and was never afterwards so much afraid of wild-cats.

My next acquaintance with the Catbirds was in the beaver meadows of North Wallace, especially in the vicinity of Emerald Farm, on which I became a resident in the spring of 1865. Here I found this species quite common and saw numbers of their nests, and their habits and peculiar notes often engaged my attention. In coming to Listowel, and continuing my observations of the avi-fauna of this section, and beginning my oological collection, I found the Catbirds numerous in most of the second growth woods, especially where there is an intermingling of evergreen shrubs with the second growth ashes and red maples. I have also noticed this species in Stanley, on the shores of Lake Huron,

and near Port Dover, on the Erie shore, and it is noted by every individual who has made out a list of the birds of Canada.

When I visited the celebrated Falls of Niagara, the second time, on the 10th of June, 1881, I noticed this bird in several of the gardens and vineries, near the margin of the rock-hewn gorge through which that river flows from the great cataract to the whirlpool, and on the morning after my arrival, when I awoke in the Paradise-like home of my friend Ralph V. Lyon, and lay listening to the murmuring sounds of the great waterfall, I was pleased to notice that among the other sounds of bird-life that came in through the window, on the dewy, flower-scented air, were those of my old and familiar feathered friend, the Catbird, and in the garden enclosures, on the Canadian side, among the many birds whose songs greet the tourist from many lands, as they approach the falls and bridges, are those of this species of the American Mocking Birds.

THE RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER.

Melanerpes Carolinus.

BY E. B. PECK, CLIFTON SPRINGS, N. Y.

The Red-bellied Woodpecker is considered the rarest species of its family that ever reaches this part of the Empire state. Occasionally a solitary individual may be seen the fore part of April on his way to the northern breeding grounds. I have never seen more than one at a time.

While out collecting one day in October, I had the good fortune to see a specimen of this species on an old dead stub, his favorite resort, where with his sharp bill and spiked tongue he draws forth his daily allowance, consisting of grubs and small worms. I raise my gun, fire and soon have him in my hands.

A few days later I was again in the same piece of woods and saw another of the same species, flitting from tree to tree, uttering a peculiar note, which is a great deal coarser than that of the Red-headed Woodpecker. On this occasion the bird is very wild and it is only after a half-hour's hard work, creeping and running through the bushes, that I get a shot and secure the bird. It is a fine female, but not near as handsome as the male.

This Woodpecker has a bright red crown and hind neck ; back barred with white and black ; throat ashy gray ; breast a very pale pink, shading into a pinkish-red or bright red. The sexes are similar, except the crown, which, in the female, is ashy gray. Length, 9 in. ; wing, 4.85 in. ; tail, 3.50 in. ; culmen 1. The eggs are pure white .96x.71.